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ABSTRACT

Wife abuse is a social problem that confronts all sectors of the human services network. It is not known what life factors influence an abused wife's initial choice to leave home and seek help in a shelter agency or to stay home and seek help in a non-shelter agency. This study was conducted to examine the relative importance of various factors associated with where an abused wife initially turns for service in the community. Women (N=75) who entered a shelter for abused wives were interviewed concerning the type of initial contact for help they made and five independent variables: abuse patterns in their family of orientation, their husband's criminal assault record, pregnancy, socioeconomic status, and the length of the marriage. The results revealed that 16 respondents had initially sought help from the shelter, while the remaining 59 women had initially contacted a variety of community resources as their initial source of help. Data analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between initial source of help and four of the five independent variables. Length of marriage appeared to influence the behavior of abused wives. The abused wife who had been married for 5 years or longer was found to be more likely to seek help initially at a shelter than was the abused wife who had been married for less than 5 years. The decision of where to seek help initially appears to be the result of a complex interplay of factors, the length of the marriage being only one of those factors. (NB)

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Differential Utilization of Selected Community Resources by Abused Wives

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DIFFERENTIAL UTILIZATION OF SELECTED
COMMUNITY RESOURCES BY ABUSED WIVES

Abstract

A study of abused wives focused on selected factors which might influence the abused wife to seek help initially from shelter agencies or from non-shelter agencies. The decision is the result of a complex interrelationship of factors. The major factor identified was the length of the abused wife's marriage relationship.

Differential Utilization of Selected Community Resources by Abused Wives

Wife abuse is a social problem that is probably as old as the family system itself, and yet as timely as the headlines in newspapers and on television. Today, it is a problem that confronts all sectors of the human services network. Included in this network are the various social service agencies, both public and private, and their staff members, especially social workers.

It is not known what life factors influence an abused wife's initial choice to leave home and seek help in a shelter agency or to stay home and seek help in a non-shelter agency. The proposed research focused on selected factors which might influence the abused wife to seek help initially from shelter agencies (such as a women's shelter) or from non-shelter agencies (such as legal services, police services, health services, social services).

Wife abuse may be thought of as "the act of physical attack by the husband on the wife -- pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, knifing, shooting or throwing an object with intent to inflict bodily harm."[1] The pattern seems to be of a man who completely loses control, punching, kicking his wife, throwing her to the ground, hitting her head against the wall, or using any weapon that may come into his hands.[2]

The causes of wife abuse are many and varied. In Maria Roy's study of 150 abused American women the following factors

were related to the eruption of violence between wife and husband: (1) arguments over money, (2) jealousy, (3) sexual problems, (4) husband's drinking or taking other drugs, (5) conflicts over the children, (6) husband's unemployment, (7) wife's desire to work outside the home, (8) pregnancy, and (9) wife's drinking or taking other drugs.[3] In addition, a history of parental violence was found in all 150 of these cases with two major themes: (1) husbands who beat their wives most often came from homes in which they themselves were beaten or where they had witnessed their own fathers beating their mothers. (2) A less significant percentage of the battered women as compared to their husbands, were beaten as children or remember seeing their mothers beaten by their fathers. However, Roy found that a large proportion of the women in the study remembered a happy home life and had found their own husband's acts of violence confusing and perplexing. Roy's findings did not corroborate many of the already existing studies linking early patterns of violence in childhood to acceptance of violence in adult life.[4]

Wife abuse is grossly under-reported because of the personal guilt felt by women who experience beatings, the inability to safely report the incident and the lack of protection offered the women who do seek police and legal methods to end the abuse. In a random sample of New Castle County (Delaware) families, four cases of severe and repetitive beatings occurred out of the fifty-seven intact families interviewed. The number of intact families in this county was estimated to be 94,000 in

1975; however, only twenty-six cases of serious family assault were reported to the police. This represents about 0.0003% of the families experiencing spouse-beating; or to use the usual census designation, twenty-eight per 100,000 families. Of the total number of serious family assaults, wives were the victims in twenty-four instances (or twenty-six per 100,000). However, in the random sample of New Castle County families 0.07% of the wives suffered severe abuse, or 7,016 per 100,000. This magnitude of under-reporting (the difference between twenty-six per 100,000 reported abuse and 7,016 per 100,000 estimated) suggests that only about one out of 270 incidents of wife-beating are ever reported to the authorities.[5]

There were several reasons for the selection of this topic for research. First, there was a recent upsurge of journal articles in relevant social work, sociology, criminal justice, medical and nursing journals, as well as in the daily newspapers and popular magazines. There was the recognition that this was a social problem which has been around but buried for a long time, and which was now "coming out of the closet."

Second, contact was initiated with relevant social work and social welfare agencies in the community. Their concern seemed to be in the area of client perceptions of social service agencies and social workers, as well as client motivations for seeking help, and also dealing with "gaps" in initial services to the abused wife.

Third, the problem of wife abuse has also been alluded to in the child welfare literature regarding child abuse. It was

this author's earlier contact with abusing parents in both literature and social work practice that initiated her interest in wife abuse and the much broader topic of family violence.

Problem in Review

The scientific research that has been done in the area of wife abuse is extremely limited, but does provide a basis from which research may be developed and implemented.

A major study, that strongly influenced the author in the development of this study on wife abuse, was conducted by Richard Gelles (1976) and addressed the question of why a woman who has been physically abused by her husband would remain with him. Indepth interviews were conducted with members of forty-one families in which women had been beaten by their husbands. Nine of these women had been divorced or separated from their husbands; thirteen had called the police, eight had sought counseling from a private social agency; and eleven had sought no outside intervention. Three major factors influenced the actions of the abused wives. The less severe and the less frequent the violence, the more likely a wife would remain with her husband. Secondly, the more a wife was struck as a child by her parents, the more likely she is to remain with her abusive husband. Lastly, the fewer resources a wife has and the less power she has, the more likely she is to remain with her violent husband. A fourth factor which appears to influence the actions of a wife is external constraint in the form of police, agency and court lack of understanding about marital violence.[6]

The connection between pregnancy and violence was mentioned in most literature on wife abuse, as well as in connection with the author's visits to social service agencies in the community. Gelles (1975) noted that few students of family relations have been aware of the crisis of pregnancy and that this often leads to physical violence. He found that violence in pregnancy is common enough to be considered an important issue in family relations.[7]

Finally, a brief look at Richard Gelles' book, The Violent Home (1972) is in order. This consists of a sample of forty agency and police families and a sample of forty neighbors (twenty for police families, twenty for agencies in Manchester and Portsmouth, New Hampshire). The objective of the research was to study the causes, incidence and types of violence (physical) used by spouses on each other. The author found a range of education, occupations and income in the violent families. It should be noted that "agency" families had fewer resources. The sample consisted mostly of young families, and the religious and racial make-up of the sample reflected the religious and racial make-up of the two cities.[8]

Margaret Ball noted that seventy-six percent of the 109 "violence clients" in her study at a family service agency were self-referrals and that they involved themselves more in agency programs than other clients. In almost all cases, it was found that violence was based on loss or implied loss.[9] John Flynn noted that when communities have not developed adequate measures to deal with violent behavior to spouses, often the blame is placed on the victims.[10]

One of the earliest studies on wife abuse was conducted by J. J. Gayford at the Chiswick Women's Aid Hostel, in London, England. He interviewed one hundred abused wives, and found that most wives were subjected to repeated violence because they had no alternative but to return to the marital home. It was concluded that places of sanctuary were needed where a wife can take her children when violence is out of control.[11]

Shelters for abused wives have a short history. In November 1972, a small shelter for abused wives was opened on Chiswick High Road in London, England.[12] One of the earliest shelters to be established in the United States was the Passage Crisis Center in the Montgomery County (Maryland) community of Silver Spring,[13] Which served approximately two hundred and fifty wives during 1978.[14] The shelter now gives the wife a place of refuge where she can make the important necessary decisions regarding her future.

There are many factors in operation at the time a woman initially contacts either a shelter agency or a non-shelter agency. The factors are sociological, psychological, biological, and historical in nature. More specific variables include length of marriage relationship, socio-economic status, pregnancy, abuse patterns in the wife's family of orientation and the husband's criminal assault record.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of selected biological (pregnancy), psychological (abuse patterns in the wife's family of orientation), historical (length of marriage relationship, husband's criminal assault record), and

sociological (socio-economic status of the abused wife) factors as these factors influence a wife's choice of initial service agency.

The study built upon a major concern of Gelles (1976) who analyzed several factors which distinguished between abused wives who sought outside intervention and those who did not seek outside intervention. His study measured the effects of (1) severity and frequency of violence; (2) experience and exposure to violence in one's family of orientation, (3) education and occupation of the wife, number of children, and age of oldest child; and (4) external constraints on the actions of the victimized wife.[15] The intent of the author's study was to assess the importance of several of these factors in determining their influence on the abused wife seeking help initially from a shelter agency or from a non-shelter agencies, and therefore, to carry Gelles' study a step further.

This study was aimed at determining the relative importance of various factors associated with where the abused wife initially turns for service in the community. Social service agencies, among others, can use the results of the study to help in evaluation of their present services to the abused wife, and also to deal with "gaps" in service on both the individual agency and the community levels. In this regard, the study can have a preventative impact on three levels: the client (abused wife); agency policies, programs and services; and community network of services.

Research Method

The population studied was seventy-five women who entered a shelter for abused wives located in a semi-urban environment during the period of December 1978 to June 1979. Sixteen of the women had initially sought help from the shelter. This was a multivariate-correlational ex post facto study implemented by questionnaire.

The major criterion or dependent variable was the type of initial contact for help made by the wives. The following major independent variables were: abuse patterns in the wife's family of orientation; husband's criminal assault record; wife's pregnancy; wife's socio-economic status; and the length of marriage relationship.

The researcher developed five hypotheses, based on the material cited earlier, especially in the literature review, that are presented as follows:

H_1 - The abused wife seeking help initially from a shelter agency is more likely to have experienced violence in her family of orientation than the abused wife who does not seek help from a shelter agency.

H_2 - The abused wife seeking help initially from a shelter agency is more likely to have a husband with a criminal assault record than the abused wife who does not initially seek help from a shelter agency.

H_3 - The abused wife who initially contacts a shelter agency has a lower socio-economic status than the abused wife who initially contacts a non-shelter agency.

H_4 - The abused wife who is pregnant is more likely to seek help initially at a shelter than an abused wife who is not pregnant.

H_5 - The abused wife who has been married five years or longer is more likely to seek help initially at a shelter than the abused wife who has been married less than five years.

The questionnaire which served as an interview schedule, was administered through face-to-face interviews with the client population of seventy-five women. The wives reported on their husband's prison record if any. The researcher's interview schedule was based on earlier questionnaires developed by Margaret Ball, John P. Flynn, J. J. Gayford and Richard Gelles, as cited earlier in the literature review.

Validity was established through the use of a panel of three independent community experts in wife abuse to evaluate the questions on a scale in such areas as clarity, appropriateness and relationship to research topics. Reliability was established through the use of the "test retest" procedure with a pilot group of twenty women selected from the total Shelter population.

The statistical design was multiple correlational model with stepwise regression analysis. The design examined how each independent variable affected the criterion or dependent variable through bivariate correlation and how the various independent variables were related and correlated with each other through multi-variate correlation analysis. The major limitation is that the population of only one shelter was studied. However, this shelter appears representative of other

crisis shelters for abused wives.[16] Therefore, the findings would appear to suggest trends useful in planning for community services.

Findings

The presentation and analysis of data centered around the five hypotheses stated earlier. In conjunction with the above mentioned hypotheses the F scores of two groups of women were compared. The first group was a subgroup of sixteen women from the total population of seventy-five women who indicated the shelter as their initial source of help. The second group was the remaining population of fifty-nine women who indicated a variety of community resources as their initial source of help. For each of the hypotheses, comparisons were made on each of the independent variables to see if there were differences between the two groups on initial sources of help. The F scores were used to test the significance of differences and were obtained through regression analysis.

There was a small, but not statistically significant correlation between the wife's experience of abuse in her family of orientation, the husband's record of arrest for assaultive behavior and the wife's socio-economic status and whether the abused wife initially contacted a shelter agency or she initially contacted a non-shelter agency. Therefore, hypotheses one, two and three were not supported. (See Table 1 for further information).

Table 1

Date Regarding Correlation in Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

Hypothesis	Simple R	F Score	F (0.05 level) for significance
1	0.083	0.51033	3.98
2	0.099	0.72822	3.98
3	0.068	0.33824	3.98

There was a large, but not statistically significant correlation between pregnancy of the abused wife, length of marriage relationship and whether the abused wife initially contacted a shelter agency or she initially contacted a non-shelter agency. In this instance, hypotheses four and five were not supported. (See Table 2 for further information.)

Table 2

Data Regarding Correlation in Hypotheses 4 and 5

Hypothesis	Simple R	F Score	F (0.05 level) for significance
4	0.118	1.04840	3.98
5	0.131	1.00702	3.98

In summary, the use of regression analysis established that no statistically significant relationship existed between the major dependent variable, initial source of help, and the five major independent variables.[17]

What is presented next are the multiple factor correlations with stepwise regression analysis and involving the major dependent variable, initial source of help, with all the major dependent variables: (1) wife's experience of abuse in her family of orientation; (2) husband's record of arrest for

assaultive behavior; (3) wife's socio-economic status; (4) wife's pregnancy; (5) length of marriage relationship.

Of major significance is the summary table of multiple and simple correlations with stepwise regression analysis which is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary Table of Multiple Factor Correlations with Stepwise Regression Analyses (N=75)

No.	Variable	Multiple R	R^2	Simple R
5	Length of Marriage Relationship	0.23755	0.05643	0.23755
4	Wife Pregnant	0.27734	0.07692	0.11899
3	Wife's Socio-economic Status	0.29815	0.08889	0.06791
2	Husband's Arrest Record for Assaultive Behavior	0.30277	0.09167	0.09938
1	Wife's Experience of Abuse in her Family of Orientation	0.30796	0.09484	0.08332

It should be noted that the summary table presents the interactive or combined effect of all major independent variables on each other and in relation to the major dependent variable (initial source of help). Each of the major variables takes on a comparative position of importance in relation to all other major variables. The ordering of these variables according to their statistical importance is seen in Table 3 where they are listed in descending order of significance from variable 5 through variable 1. The length of marriage relationship was statistically significant.

The length of the marriage relationship of the abused wives is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Length of Marriage Relationship

Years	75 Wives
Less 1 year	10
1-2 years	4
2-5 years	25
5-10 years	18
10-15 years	11
Over 15 years	7

Table 4 indicates the length of marriage relationship; according to interpretation, the largest number occurs between two to five years of marriage. The second largest number occurs between five to ten years of marriage.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to determine what life factors influenced an abused wife to seek help initially from a shelter agency or from non-shelter agencies (such as legal services, police services, health services, social services). The analysis of the variables which affected the decision to seek help initially from a shelter agency or from a non-shelter agency uncovered one major factor which influenced the behavior of the abused wives. Through the use of multiple factor correlations with stepwise regression analysis, the study seemed to confirm the fifth stated hypothesis. That is, the abused wife who has been married five years or longer is more likely to seek help

initially at a shelter than the abused wife who has been married less than five years. In addition, according to Table 4, it was noted that fifty-four or seventy-five percent of the abused wives were married two to fifteen years.

It appears that the longer an abused wife is married, the more likely she is to seek outside help either at a shelter or a non-shelter facility. If she has sought outside intervention before, she might have been made aware of the resources of the local shelter. At the next episode of abuse, she then turns initially to the shelter for help with her problems. The majority of wives interviewed were "natives" of the community and were familiar with the network of community services, including the shelter. In addition, several commented learning about the shelter through the local mass media, and were then able to use it as their initial source of help after the next abuse episode.[18]

Related to this is the fact that the average age of the abused wives in this study was 30.3 years. It seems that the younger woman who has been married for a shorter period of time is less likely to tolerate abuse from her husband and seems more willing than the older woman who has been married longer to seek outside intervention. Perhaps the older woman feels a stigma about being abused that causes her to be reluctant to seek outside intervention.

The women's liberation movement with its emphasis on consciousness-raising has perhaps contributed to abused wives seeking help in the community for their problem after years of abuse in silence. The movement has helped women to feel that

they have dignity and worth and can do something about their abusive marital relationship.

The author has not provided a complete answer to the question that this paper raised, even though one factor was presented which partially explained where abused wives initially turned for help in the community. The reactions of an abused wife in this situation are complex and it is difficult to pinpoint the specific factors involved in the decision-making process. It is more than whether the abused wife experienced violence in her family of orientation, has a husband with a criminal assault record, has a certain socio-economic status, is pregnant and has been married five years or longer. One of the factors involved in deciding where to go initially for help in the community has been identified in this paper. It should be remembered that the decision of where to seek help initially is the result of a complex interplay of factors, only one of which has been identified in this article.

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